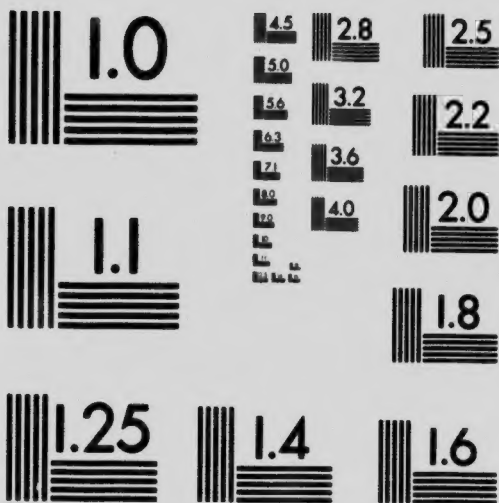




WHAT EVERY Christian Father Can and Should Do



*By Father of the Society
of St. Basil*

Imprimatur

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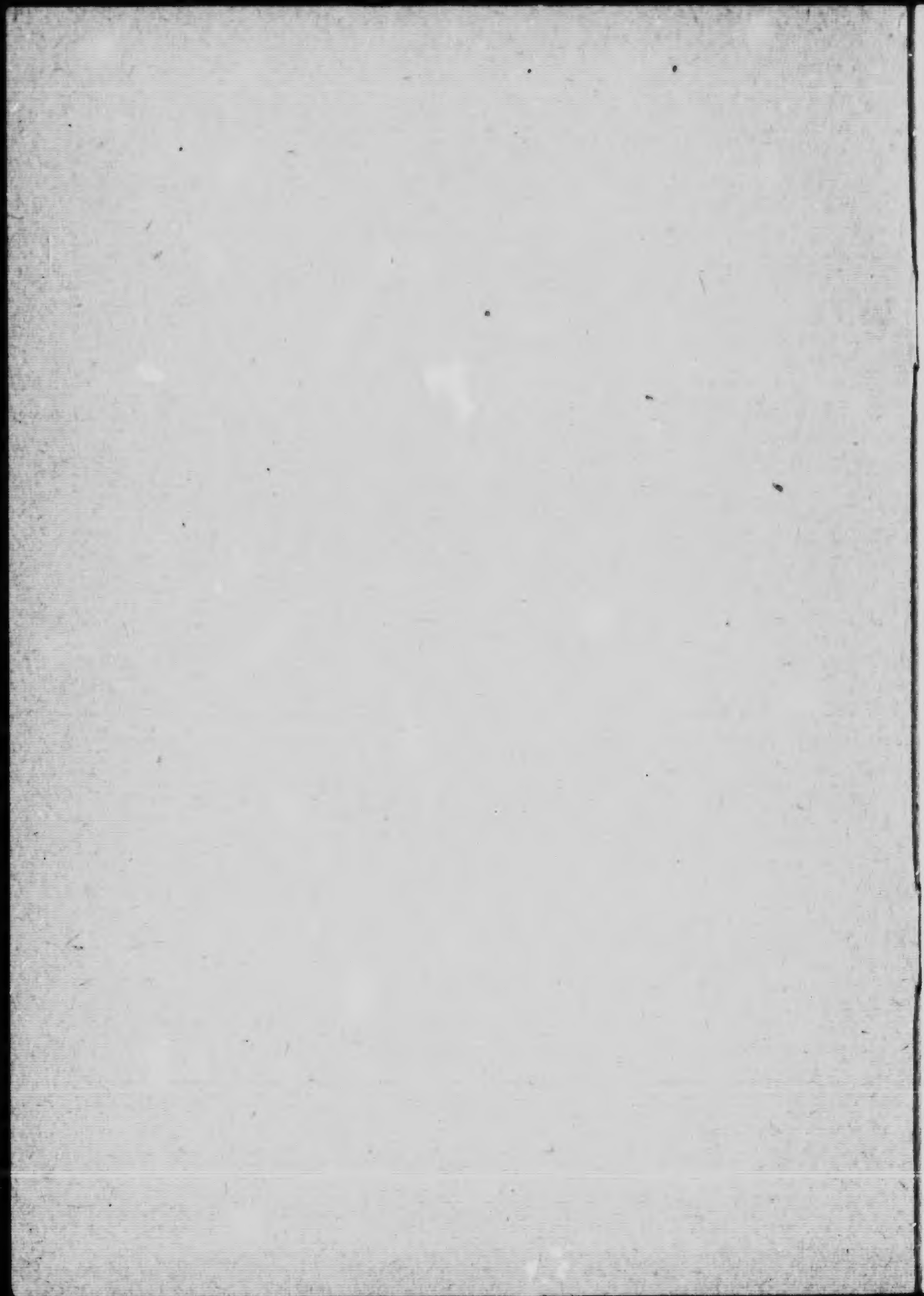
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What Every Christian Father Can and Should Do

By a Father of the Society of St. Basil

Never forget, father of a Christian family, that it is you who have the obligation of training your children in the knowledge and practice of their religion. As head of the family you have both the authority and the responsibility. It is a personal obligation; you must not delegate it to another; you must attend to it. Your vocation as father calls you to it. If you neglect it, it will never be done,—at least it will not be done at all as God intended it should. You can not, therefore, satisfy your conscience by leaving it to your wife, and even if you could, we trust you will not. As a rule, your evenings are freer than hers. The red man shot a deer or felled a tree and then returned to his cabin, allowing his wife to lug them home as best she could; that is no reason why you should sit evening after evening enjoying your pipe, or stand on the street corner, or perhaps betake yourself to some place of amusement, while the worn, worried woman, amid a multitude of tasks not yet com-

pleted, tries to make up for your neglect by looking after the children's prayers and catechism lessons.

You say your children are going to a Catholic school and the sisters and teachers are attending to this. They cannot; no teacher can take your place. You have a father's heart and a father's anxiety for the welfare of his children; you have also a father's authority; God has given these to no one on earth but you. These children are to you what they are to no other human being. Moreover, is your part merely to drudge and toil that they have enough to eat and wherewith to be clothed, while others have to do with their minds and hearts and wills, with their habits, their affections, their thoughts? Is this your conception of the dignity of a father? Are your efforts merely to sustain their lives on earth, utterly regardless of that other life which is eternal?

Your father did not do all this for you in your childhood, you say. Precisely, and here is the result. It has never occurred to you to do otherwise than follow the example he left you. What would be your practice in this matter to-day if your father had done his duty? Now, which would you prefer to leave as a heritage to your sons? Would you have them neglect the religious training of their children in turn? Do you appreciate what will be the consequences for your grand-

children, for many future generations, of your setting a good example to-day?

"You cannot instruct your children in their religion?" Then lose no time in learning how. This objection did not deter you from marrying and becoming a father; it will not excuse you from fulfilling the obligation of a father. If you do not understand your religion well enough to be of assistance to your children, it is very doubtful if you know what is necessary to save your own soul. Do you not know your prayers, or do you know or say very few? For the sake of your own eternal salvation there is no time to lose.

But, you argue, "I cannot even read." That is positively no excuse. Many of the most exemplary families you and I have known received their religious training from fathers who could not read, living in places where neither parochial nor Sunday schools were heard of.

Try what you can do; give the time to it; don't grow weary; be faithful to it, evening after evening, Sunday after Sunday, week after week, year after year.

Now, let us see what you can do certainly.

(1) The catechism speaks of eight prayers which are particularly recommended to us. The Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Apostles' Creed, and Confiteor, The Acts of Contrition,

Faith, Hope, and Charity; all of these you have known from your boyhood, of course. If not, there is no time to lose; learn them at once, no matter what means you have to resort to. Each one of your children must learn these *from you* before the age of first confession and communion. If they commence, as all children should, with the first use of speech, and come to memory but two prayers yearly, the task will be accomplished by their seventh birthday.

This, however, is small; you and I have probably heard of many who had known all these at seven and forgotten them before twenty. The lesson is obvious; you must see, therefore, that your children do not forget them; you must hear them recite their prayers evening after evening when they are still young; later you must be certain they are not neglecting them, and you must find out how much time they give to them. A scrupulous vigilance must be maintained; do not be satisfied with the question, "Have you said your prayers this morning?" Many a child has answered "Yes" over and over whose faithfulness was represented by the time required for one Our Father and Hail Mary, until this minimum effort had become the established form of morning devotions. Therefore, find out regularly what their daily prayers consist of. Do not recoil before the task. The

men and women who have grown up Christians endowed with habits of prayer were trained in this way by their parents. There is no other method; certainly you are not expecting the teacher to look after this! On the other hand, you might reflect occasionally that to supply your family with daily bread is an undertaking which is not achieved without constant effort. Your life may be a very busy one, your responsibilities trying, your ambitions far-reaching, but positively there can never be anything which so seriously demands your attention as this. If you neglect it the day most certainly will come when you shall look back and pronounce your whole life a failure. No one becomes an infidel until he ceases to pray; there are none indifferent to their religious duties who continue to devoutly say their night and morning prayers; your children will be faithful to them through life if you do your part to form them in those habits now.

(2) The spirit of Catholicity has made the Rosary the peculiar devotion of the Christian home. No candidate for the priesthood can be raised to Holy Orders without accepting the obligation of daily reading the Divine Office; no young couple should undertake the obligations contracted in the holy state of Matrimony without resolving that throughout life the Rosary shall be the common even-

ing prayer of their home. As head of the home, it is your duty to daily assemble the older members of the family to this devotion.

(3) Your children should be taught the Angelus, prayers before and after meals, upon rising and retiring, ejaculations to be made in times of temptation, or danger, etc., etc. You can do this, too. You would not omit these practices yourself, and you are equally anxious that your children shall not omit them either.

(4) You sanctify Sunday not merely by going to Mass, but by having your children accompany you to church and seated with you while there. Have you ever known young men to miss Mass habitually whose attendance during school years was most regular? Are you surprised? Why should Holy Mass seem so important when their father showed so little interest in their attendance? Perhaps that was not the only reason. Perhaps they always found it an irksome task, a tiresome routine. They had not been trained to assist thereat properly; they had not learned to distinguish its parts; they were not provided with prayer-books; there was no piety or devotion in the act; perhaps they remained near the door and talked and gazed around; in any case, they were allowed to pass the half-hour unoccupied and looking for the end.

There was nothing very surprising, therefore, in their abandoning the practice entirely when old enough to assert themselves. But this need not be the case with your boys; in after life they will attend Holy Mass not only with regularity, but also with attention and fervor, and consolation to themselves, if you are with them in church and looking after their behaviour now. It is the peculiar grace of every religious function or ceremony to afford greater and greater interest as years go by, if we have habituated ourselves to take part in it with becoming respect and devotion.

(5) You say that you are willing to make any sacrifice that your children may have the advantage of a Catholic school, that you often inconvenience yourself and your home to ensure their punctual attendance at the Sunday-school classes, that you do not feel competent to explain the doctrines of our religion and answer all the questions which may arise, and that for this you claim the assistance of the pastor and the religious teachers. In this you are right. It is their plain duty to assist you. Always remember, however, that their part is to *assist*; on you falls the responsibility primarily. They will always be ready to supply what you cannot be expected to *provide*. But, tell me, Christian father, are

you doing *all you can*? Almost daily there are catechism lessons to be prepared, some answers to be learned by rote. This requires the assistance of neither teacher nor priest; it should be committed to memory in the *home*, not in the school. Are you seeing to it? Do your children evening after evening recite their catechism lesson *in your hearing*? If you cannot read the catechism there are others in the house who can; the essential is that you be present during the recitation. You probably understand without further comment how greatly this practice would contribute to your own instruction. Many priests who had been considered exceptionally familiar with their catechism at the age of twelve, who passed the following twelve years in the Catholic school, college and seminary, do not hesitate to say that only years later, as assistant or pastor conducting classes of religious instruction in the parochial school, did they discover the wealth of doctrine and information that little book contained.

(6) Are you doing all in your power to promote good reading among the members of your family? You subscribe for the Catholic paper and most likely read it yourself; is it a matter of haphazard whether your children read it or not? There are Catholic books immeasurably rich in interest and charm; if

you cannot afford to purchase them,—which you should, if possible—at least you have access to the parish library. Have you made the important discovery that every young person will find these more entertaining than nine-tenths of the popular literature which the world is daily devouring. The only adults who do not read Catholic stories and Lives of Saints by preference are they who were not habituated to their use in childhood, whose tastes were vitiated by novels, current magazines, and other worldly literature. It is a remarkable fact that in the biography of almost every Catholic layman who rose to prominence in life and preserved his faith and piety in the midst of every form of worldly distraction, it is recorded that the reading aloud of religious books was a regular practice in his father's home. There is no reason why all this could not be carried out in your home as well.

(7) Yes, your pastor will prepare your children for First Confession and Communion; they will have been started on the way to Heaven. Nor need there be any alarm during life, no matter what the surroundings or temptations, if only they persevere in their resolutions, if only they can preserve the dispositions which on that morning are welling up in their innocent hearts. Will they con-

tinue to approach these Sacraments frequently and always with similar dispositions? This is for you to decide; it is quite within your power. But do not leave it to the teacher to remind them that the day for Confession has arrived; you must think of that, you must help them to make a preparation, and, when possible, accompany them. Never forget that they are children, with all the thoughtlessness of childhood. They may easily fall into the habit of going to confession after a preparation alarmingly brief, and they may leave the church with little or no thanksgiving after Communion. How many a promise of sanctity, of a life full of great things for God, has suffered the decay that comes of woeful indifference, perhaps has ended in the loss of Faith altogether, due solely to indifference in this very matter. Assure yourself, therefore, that the evil do not find its way among those precious souls for whom you are one day to answer to God.

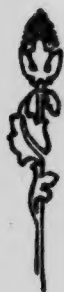
Now, dear Christian father, by this time, perhaps, you are beginning to think that a rather lengthy and onerous series of duties has been outlined for you. Positively nothing, however, that you cannot do. None which you did not accept of your own accord in becoming a father. Why then would you not attend to them?

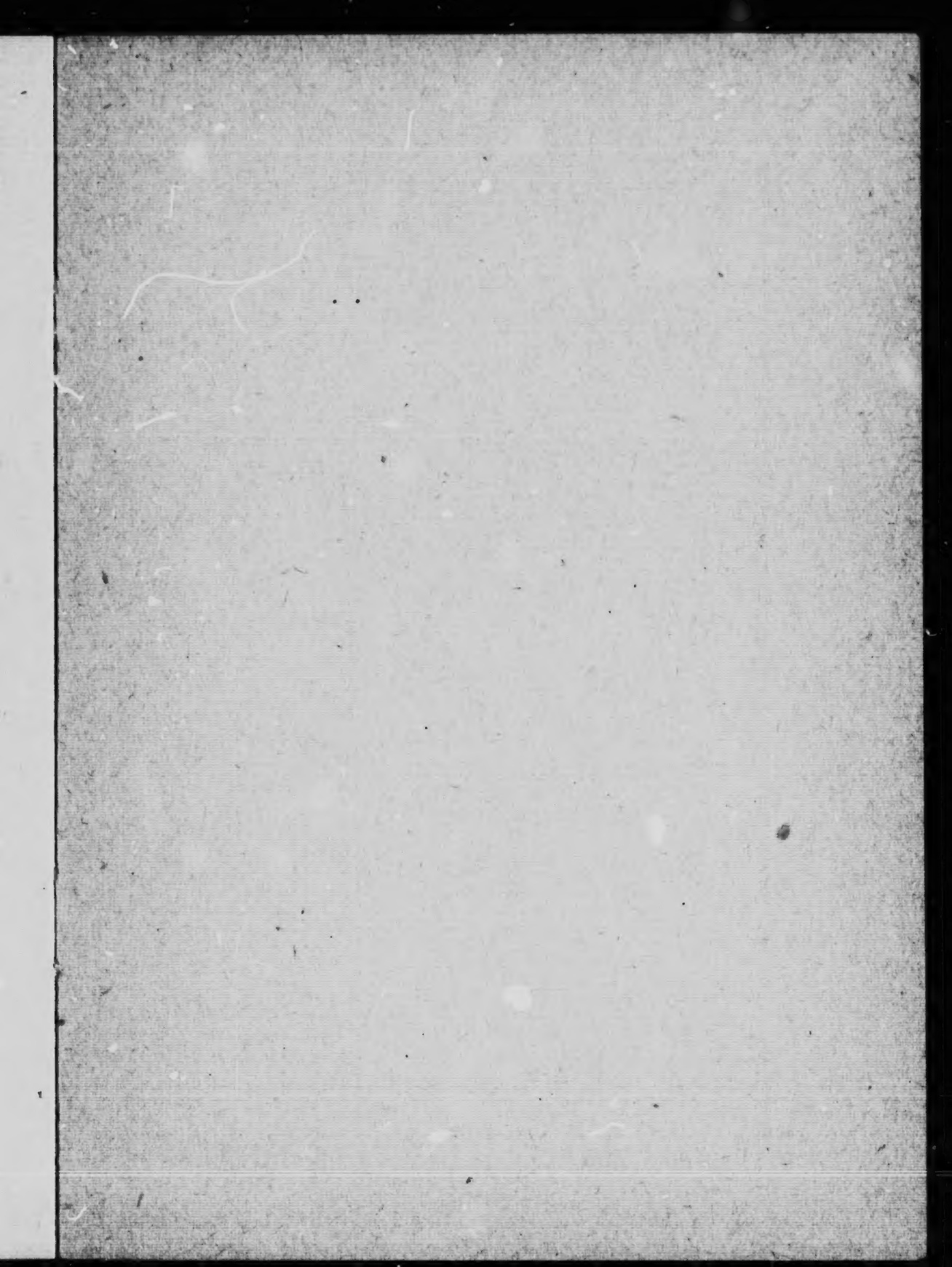
To you these children owe their existence;

how valueless that existence, how utterly valueless all your efforts in their behalf, if you have not provided for their happiness in eternity!

“What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?”

What will it profit a family if their father have struggled even to the very limit of endurance to support, to provide for them, to advance their wordly position, and has not looked after the interests of their immortal souls?





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